

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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-----014645 081728Z /53

R 081459Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4737
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 5732

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SY
SUBJECT: NEW ARRESTS REPORTED

1. SUMMARY: THE CORRUPTION ARRESTS HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN EXPANDED TO INCLUDE FORMER PRIMIN AYYUBI AND DEPPRIMIN HAYDAR. THIS MOVE, IF CONFIRMED, WOULD BE MAJOR ESCALATION OF PRESIDENT'S CAMPAIGN INTO TOP LEVEL OF BAATH PARTY. REPORTS HE HAS EXTENDED ARRESTS INTO THE MILITARY HAVE NOT BEEN CONFIRMED. WE ARE INCREASINGLY INCLINED BELIEVE, AS ARE MANY IN DAMASCUS, THAT THE PRESIDENT IS IN EARNEST AND HAS NO INTENTION OF CALLING AN IMMEDIATE HALT TO CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY

2. THE WAVE OF ARRESTS FOR CORRUPT PRACTICES CONTINUES, THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT'S SECRECY HAS SPAWNED NAMEROUS CONFLICT-ING RUMORS ABOUT NUMBER AND IDENTITY OF ARRESTED INDIVIDUALS. PART OF CONFUSION STEMS FROM FACT THAT SOME INDIVIDUALS ARE BEING PLACED IN JAIL WHILE OTHERS ARE UNDER A LOOSE FORM OF HOUSE ARREST. AN ADDITIONAL POINT OF CONFUSION MAY BE THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS REPORTEDLY RECEIVED AND
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IS CONSIDERING A SECOND LIST OF THOSE THE INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE SEEKS TO HAVE ARRESTED, AND SOME OF THE INDIVIDUALS WHOM WE ARE TOLD HAVE BEEN ARRESTED MAY ACTUALLY APPEAR ON THE LIST OF THOSE YET TO BE ARRESTED. FINALLY, IF THE ARRESTS ARE NOW RAEACHING INTO THE BAATH PARTY COMMAND, THE GOVERNMENT, AND THE MILITARY WE CAN EXPECT FAR TIGHTER CONTROL OF INFORMATION RELATING TO THOSE ARRESTS.

3. MOST SIGNIFICANT NAMES MENTIONED TO POLOFF BY FOUR INDEPENDENT SOURCES AS BEING UNDER LOOSE HOUSE ARREST ARE MUHAMMAD VU HAYDAR, FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER FOR ECONOMY, AN ALAWITE, AND A NUMBER OF THE BAATH PARTY NATIONAL AND REGIONAL COMMANDS AS WELL AS OF THE COMMAND OF THE NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE FRONT (NPF) AND MAHUMD AYYUBI, FORMER PRIME MINISTER, A SUNNI AND A MEMBER OF THE BAATH PARTY NATIONAL COMMAND AS WELL AS THE NPF COMMAND. HAYDAR IS NOTORIOUS FOR HIS CORRUPTION AND AYYUBI HAS BEEN TAINTED BY THE ILLEGAL ACTIVITY THAT WENT ON WHILE HE WAS PRIME MINISTER. BOTH MEN HAVE BEEN CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD IN THE PAST. FROM ASSAD'S POINT OF VIEW THOSE ARRESTS ARE WELL SUITED TO DEMONSTRATE TO THE SYRIANS THE SINCERITY OF HIS CAMPAIGN. HE HAS ATTACKED TWO OF HIS OWN PEOPLE, TWO MEN IN THE PUBLIC MIND MOST IDENTIFIED WITH CORRUPTION, A KEY ALAWITE, AND A KEY SUNNI BAATH POLITICIAN, NEITHER MAN HAS A SIGNIFICANT INDEPENDENT POWER BASE IN THE MILITARY, THE SECURITY APPARATUS, OR THE PARTY ALTHOUGH BOTH MEN CAN CAUSE PROBLEMS BY DRAGGING OTHERS INTO THE INVESTIGATION IN TERMS OF DIRECT POWER EACH IS EXPENDABLE.

4. IN ADDITION WE HAVE BEEN TOLD, BUT HAVE NO CONFIRMATION, THAT THE NEPHEW OF CHIEF OF STAFF SHIHABI AND THE BROTHER OF MAHMUD HADID, REGIONAL COMMAND MEMBER AND PRESIDENT OF CONFIDENTIAL

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THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOR UNIONS, HAVE BOTH BEEN ARRESTED. BOTH FAMILIES ARE RESPECTED, ONE MILITARILY AND ONE POLITICALLY. ARREST OF THEIR MEMBERS IS NO LIGHT STEP, PARTICULARLY IF OTHER KEY FAMILIES, WHERE CORRUPTION IS EVIDENT, REMAIN UNTOUCHED.

5. POLOFF HEARD FROM EAST GERMAN NEWSMAN THAT 20 HIGH LEVEL MILITARY OFFICERS WHO DEAL WITH MILITARY PROCUREMENT ARE ALSO UNDER HOUSE ARREST. WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CONFIRM THIS REPORT AND HAVE BEEN TOLD BY SEVERAL MILITARY SOURCES THAT IT IS NOT TRUE. THE REPORT MAY BE PREMATURE, NEVERTHELESS IT IS LOGICAL TO ASSUME THAT IF THE GENTS WHO DEALT WITH MILITARY PROCUREMENT OFFICERS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED THEN THE LATTER WILL ALSO FACE DISCIPLINARY ACTION. WHILE THE PRESIDENT MAY NOT BE WILLING TO EXTEND THE PURGE TO THE MILITARY AT THIS POINT IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW HE CAN, IN THE LONG RUN, AVOID MAKING THIS MOVE, PERHAPS FAVORING DISMISSALS OVER ARRESTS. FROM ASSAD'S POINT OF VIEW, THESE ARRESTS WOULD GO PART OF THE WAY TOWARD ANSWERING DISAFFECTION OF LOWER AND MIDDLE GRADE OFFICERS WHICH HAS BEEN INCREASING IN THE FACE OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS. THE EAST GERMAN NEWSMAN SAID ASSAD HAD

RECEIVED PLEDGES OF SUPPORT FROM THESE OFFICERS IN KEY
UNITS IF HE WOULD PURSUE THE HOUSECLEANING.

5. POLOFF WAS TOLD BY BROTHER OF ONE OF DEFENSE COMPANY
OFFICERS THAT THEIR COMMANDER, RIF'AT AL-ASSAD, HAS BEEN DURING
LAST TEN DAYS UNUSALLY ACTIVIE TOURING HIS UNITS IN
UNIFORM TO REINFORCE LOYALTY OF HIS TROOPS. STORY BEING
TOLD THAT RIF'AT FOUGHT AGAINST HIS BROTHER'S DECISION
TO PURSUE CORRUPTION INVESTIGATION. PRESIDENT SAID
IT WAS BECAUSE OF RIF'AT ACTIONS THAT HE HAD BEEN FORCED
TO ENGAGE IN DRIVE AGAINST CORRUPTION, TO WHICH RIF'AT
REPLIED: "LIAR, IT IS YOU AND YOUR CRONIES WHO HAVE CORRUPTED
THIS REGIME."

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 5732

6. RIF'AT HAS APPARENTLY ORDERED HIS OFFICERS TO MAINTAIN
A LOW PROFILE PUBLICLY FOR A WHILE AND HAS PROHIBITED THEM
FROM USING ILLEGALLY OBTAINED PRIVATE AUTOMOBILES. HE HAS
MEANWHILE, UNCHARACTERISTICALLY, STAYED OUT OF THE PUBLIC
LIMELIGHT, LEADING TO RUMORS THAT HE HAS RETREATED TO THE
SECURITY OF HIS FORCES AND MAY CHALLENGE HIS BROTHER IN
STREETS OF DAMASCUS AND, ALTERNATIVELY, THAT HE HAS LEFT
THE COUNTRY AND WILL BE REPLACED AS COMMANDER OF THE
DEFENSE COMPANIES BY A SUNNI NAMED (FNU) QUTAISH. WE
HAVE NO EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT EITHER RUMOR AND DOUBT THAT
EITHER IS TRUE. NEVERTHELESS, THE FACT THAT SOME SYRIANS
ARE BEGINNING TO BELIEVE THAT EVEN ASSAD'S BROTHER IS
NOT IMMUNE FROM THE PRESIDENT'S ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN

REPRESENTS A MAJOR ATTITUDINAL CHANGE HERE.

7. THE PRIME MINISTER IS BEING CREDITED WITH THE OVERALL PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF ASSAD'S CAMPAIGN. HE SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION PREVIOUSLY ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS PRECISELY BECAUSE HE WAS UNABLE TO GET ASSAD'S BACKING FOR SUCH A HOUSE-CLEANING. WHILE THERE MAY BE MINISTERIAL CHANGES TO COME
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BECAUSE OF THE DRIVE ON CORRUPTION IT SEEMS INCREASINGLY OBVIOUS THAT KHULAYFAWI WILL STAY. MININFO AHMED ISKANDAR AHMAD TOLD RELIABLE SOURCE THAT AFTER THE PRESIDENT'S ANTI-CORRUPTION SPEECH TO THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL, KHULAYFAWI ANNOUNCED TO THE CABINET THAT HE INTENDS TO REMAIN AS PRIME MINISTER.

8. KHULAYFAWI'S LATEST MOVES HAVE BEEN TO RESTRICT THE ISSUANCE OF PASSPORTS TO ANY HIGH LEVEL GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL WITHOUT SPECIAL APPROVAL, TO ORDER THE DETENTION OF ANY OFFICIAL USING GOVERNMENT VEHICLES FOR PRIVATE REASONS, AND TO DEMAND STATEMENTS WITHIN ONE WEEK OF FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS AND ASSETS FROM EVERY MINISTER, AMBASSADOR, GOVERNOR AND PUBLIC SECTOR DIRECTOR. THE STATEMENTS ARE TO INCLUDE ALL OBLIGATIONS AND ASSETS OF THE INDIVIDUAL, HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN AS OF JANUARY 1, 1970 OR AS OF THE DATE HE ASSUMED HIS FIRST LEADING POST, WHICHEVER IS LATER. THE STATEMENTS ARE OBVIOUSLY DESIGNED TO ESTABLISH PRIMA FACIE CASES OF CORRUPTION IN OFFICE BY COMPARING INCREASES IN NET WORTH OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS WITH LEGITIMATE SOURCES OF INCOME.

9. REQUIRING THESE STATEMENTS IS A SIGNAL THAT PRESIDENT ASSAD HAS NOT ATTAINED HIS FINAL OBJECTIVE AND INTENDS TO CONTINUE HIS CAMPAIGN. IF THE ARRESTS OF HAYDAR AND AYYUBI ARE CONFIRMED, ASSAD WILL HAVE EXTENDED HIS CAMPAIGN INTO THE CENTER OF THE BAATH PARTY. AYYUBI, WE UNDERSTAND, WAS ONCE BEFORE THREATENED WITH ARREST FOR HIS ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES WHILE HE WAS PRIME MINISTER BUT SAVED HIMSELF BY THREATENING TO AIR LOT OF DIRTY BAATH PARTY LINEN IN PUBLIC. THE ODDS FOR JUST THIS HAPPENING ARE INCREASING. WHATEVER HAPPENS, DAMASCUS CYNICS ARE NO LONGER SCOFFING AT ASSAD'S ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN.
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Message Attributes

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